ORAL FITNESS FACT SHEET

Women's Oral Health

Menstruation, pregnancy, menopause, hormones and medications affect a woman's oral health. Hormones cause an increase of bacteria in the mouth. Use good oral hygiene to keep bacteria under control:

- Brush with fluoride toothpaste two or three times a day.
- Floss each day.

Oral Contraceptives

Women using birth control pills are twice as likely to have a tooth pulled that does not heal well. Gingivitis (gum disease) may occur with long-term use of birth control pills. Hormonal changes can cause increased tenderness, swelling, and bleeding of your gums when you brush your teeth.

Pregnancy

Pregnant women have varying hormone levels. The changing hormones can cause red, swollen, tender gums that are more likely to bleed. 50 - 70 percent of women get gingivitis.

"Morning sickness" or vomiting can wear down teeth because of exposure to stomach acids.

- Rinse with your mouth with baking soda mixed in water to neutralize the stomach acid.
- Rinse with water, if there is no baking soda.
- Don't brush your teeth for at least an hour after vomiting. Brushing right away can remove the outer layer of tooth enamel.

Nausea or hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) sometimes requires eating between meal snacks that can cause tooth decay.

- Avoid sugary and sticky foods.
- Snack on foods such as vegetables, fruits, and cheese.
- Brush your teeth after snacking.

Menopause

Women can experience dry mouth, burning sensations, swollen, red and bleeding gums, and changes in taste during menopause or when using hormonal replacement therapy. Gums can be sore and sensitive to brushing.

Xerostomia (dry mouth)

Various medications such as anti-depressants, diet pills, and over-the-counter medications can decrease your saliva flow and cause xerostomia. Because there is less protective saliva, your risk for cavities and gum disease is increased.

- Sip water or other sugar-free drinks (not soda) frequently.
- Stimulate the flow of your saliva by:
  - Eating sugarless (diabetic-type) candies or Xylitol mints.
  - Chewing sugarless or Xylitol-sweetened gum.
  - Sucking on a cherry or olive pit.